WILL THE FARALLONES BE THE "THRESHOLD FORTRESS" IN PACIFIC COULD MAKE GOLDEN GATE AS IMPREGNABLE AS THE NORTH SEA PORTS. SITUATION IS UNIQUE

HELIGOLAND, GERMANY'S "THRESHOLD FORTRESS"

BREECH OF A U.S. COAST DEFENSE GUN

By CLARENCE A. LOCAN

THIRTY miles due west of San Francisco, sticking up out of the Pacific, is a sentinel that would be this city's most powerful safeguard from attack, according to military experts, in case some enemy threatened war from this side of the continent. For San Francisco has in the Farallones a second Heligoland—a replica of that remarkable fortress that guarded Germany's North sea ports—in the making.

It was during the European war that the value of the Farallones as a "threshold fortress" for San Francisco first became known, when an Army engineer in a report suggested its fortification, and declared that just a few large guns would make San Francisco safe for all time from sea attack.

In Line With Gate

In a direct line with the Golden Gate and the wide expanse of the Pacific from which, in case of an attack, warships would come, its guns could sweep the sea for miles about—casting about it a circle of steel that no ship would dare attempt to penetrate. Whether this will ever be is not discussed in the War Department, but that Army engineer's plans were filed, and—well, the Army isn't saying any thing. But the island is a Federal bird reservation, the Government is maintaining a lighthouse and weather bureau there—and there's always a possibility.

The position of the Farallones in relation to San Francisco is almost identical with that of Heligoland to the German coast, especially the Kiel canal [illegible] and made obtained by [illegible] wooden [illegible] in 1890, and built up with concrete retaining walls where the sea was slowly washing it away. A few years later the military world was astounded to learn that it was the most remarkable fortress in all time.

Ideal for Fort

The Farallones are even more adaptable for a fortress. Heligoland covers only one-fifth of a square mile; its 3000 people are huddled on the little water-bound rock, mostly underground, for the German builders tunneled and excavated rock galleries. Heligoland is much like several six-story buildings buried under the earth, and entered from the roof. But its great guns, flinging their circle of death, made it an impassible barrier through the European war—and sea attackers dared not brave its withering fire.

The Farallones have more room to work in. There are seven islands, the extreme points about seven miles apart, and the southermost accommodates the lighthouse and weather bureau. There is little vegetation, but thousands of birds make their home there, the island being a Government reservation, where the feathered residents are protected from hunters. The rainfall is heavy, being about nineteen inches a year—but that has nothing to do with the guns.

Topography Differs

Unlike Heligoland, which was being rapidly eaten away by the sea when the German military experts built it up with concrete until it became almost an artificial island of cement and steel, the Farallones are on a solid foundation and of a formation that will endure. There being several islands, they act as breakwaters to one another, and it would be hundreds of years before they might possibly begin to erode to any appreciable extent, according to geologists. Heligoland was so far gone that had engineers not built it up it would have probably been practically under water by now.

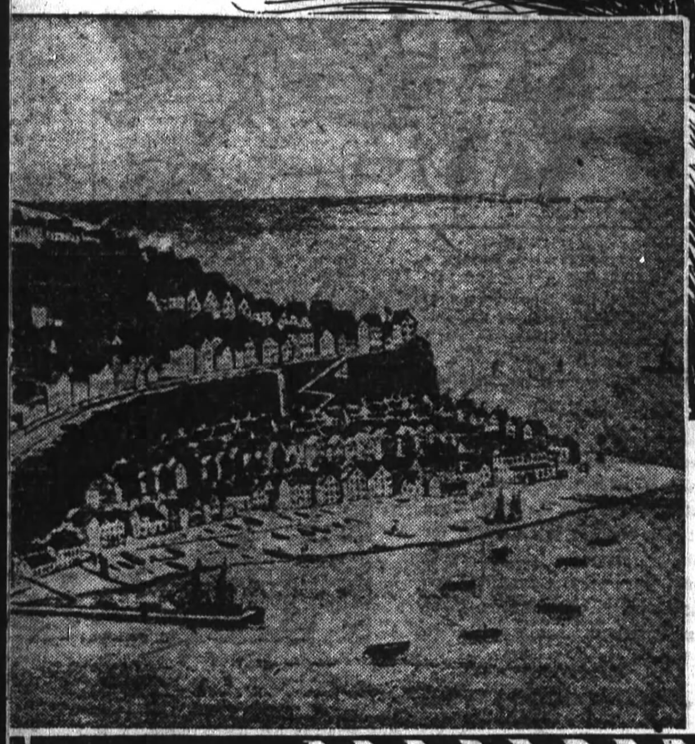
The Farallones, much like Alcatraz Island in the bay, are of hard rock formation with practically no soil. The islands are devoid of vegetation, being nothing but bleak, peaked rocks. From the distance they are beautiful; to one living upon them they are cheerless, bleak spots, the cold fogs and swirling rains that almost continually envelop them adding to their dank gloom.

These very fogs would, in a measure, make them dangerous, as an approaching enemy would have trouble in discerning their vital spots as targets. The artillerymen on the island, however, by "Squaring off" the sea areas and establishing ranges for all possible contingencies in advance, would have far less trouble in locating approaching enemies with the modern facilities for warfare.

Fortresses such as would be built on the Farallones would not, military experts say, be such as are commonly pictured. The fortress of today is invisible; behind towering rocks would lie disappearing guns that would rise to fire their loads of death, and then sink into invisibility again. Modern warfare has taught military authorities many things, and "camouflage," to avoid the gaze of airmen, is one. The big guns would be covered in some manner and painted to represent their rock surroundings, so that even if an enemy airplane succeeded in flying overhead, location of its hidden batteries would be unlikely.

These are all details to be worked

HELIGOLAND OF THE PACIFIC?



U.S. HEAVY ARTILLERY IN ACTION

ut by Army engineers — how they ould be accomplished and where ie gun pits would be located would ave to be carefully devised.

ew Batteries Needed

According to the engineer's report, few batteries of the heavy Coast rtillery type of guns would make an impregnable defense for the olden Gate. No ship could ap- oach within miles of the islands— nd that means miles plus thirty more—the distance from the gate to the islands—to San Francisco. Ships, to get near enough to hurl shells into the bay region, must be in such easy range of the Farallone gunners that their attempt would be sheer suicide.

Hence, the Heligoland of the Pacific.

Besides the possibility of the islands, San Francisco is guarded by great Coast Artillery guns on the Golden Gate, but these might not prevent the city being shelled, although they could without a doubt prevent any landing being made. But the Golden Gate's Heligoland would make even the most distant approach at which a ship's gun might menace California an impossibility in the vicinity of San Francisco.

The Farallones have often formed an inspiration for artists. The rugged crags of the larger island make a wonderful picture as one approaches it from either side, and its wheeling flocks of strange birds add to its unique beauty. It is the "Pacific barometer" of the weather bureau, for from the islands approaching storms are reported in to the weather bureau in the Merchants' Exchange building. The seals at the Cliff House visit it when anything happens on shore that frightens them, for it's a short swim for a seal. What would the timid seals do if big guns roared from the islands that for centuries have been their happy camping grounds?

San Francisco's danger of war attack is remote, of course; and perhapsethat's why the plans for the "threshold fortress" lie in the War Department archives, with perhaps a few changes made now and then to keep them "alive." But—who knows? Some day history may be written with blood again—and perhaps the menace may come from this side of the continent.

San Francisco Safe

Then, a few big guns—and a few expert artillery men to man them—and San Francisco need not fear. The Golden Gate will be safer than even the Kiel canal, despair of the British navy during the last struggle. It's not nice to think of another war—it's not probable that there will be one—but the knowledge of the Heligoland of the Golden Gate may help make chances of war more remote. It's the old story over again of a country having so many guns it doesn't have to fire any.

And the great naval base to be built in the bay, the great naval plant at Mare island, the Goat island naval reservation, all need protection. The fact that this protection exists, thirty miles out at sea, makes their presence in the bay assured for all time, and makes the bay the stronghold of the West.

And it's all because, at latitude 123-04 west, longitude 37-41-58 north—a sailor will understand—some rocks stick up from the Pacific—home of sea gulls—and, incidentally, the dove of peace.